

SECTION 2 – PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION



Mill building rehabilitated for use as office and commercial space

number of settlers farmed the land in this area and built small mills along the banks of these rivers. Over time, these settlers found that the abundance of waterpower provided by the Merrimack and Concord Rivers created an excellent opportunity for extensive mill development. Lowell's industrial beginnings evolved from this availability of waterpower.

Ultimately, this renewable resource led to the development of Lowell as a planned industrial community based on the efficient production of textiles. As a result, Lowell was the second largest city in New England in the 1840s, and by revolutionizing the textile industry became the industrial center of America. However, as with many other American cities, Lowell experienced significant economic change in the 20th century. As older manufacturing plants closed

A) General History

Historically, this site and surrounding area was part of an important encampment area for Native Americans. The gentle slopes leading down to both the Concord and Merrimack Rivers provided the Pawtucket people with a summer encampment area and fishing grounds. When European settlers arrived in 1629, they also found this a good place to settle. As a result, a small



Mill building south of Project Area - later converted to senior housing. Photo courtesy of National Park Service





View from Lawrence Street looking toward site

or moved out of the area, jobs were lost and the economy faltered. In the 1980s, however, the Lowell area experienced resurgence as a center of technology. Coupled with this economic boom, the city received designation as a National Historic Park in 1978 as a tribute to Lowell's contribution to the industrial revolution.

As a result of these recent initiatives, Lowell's downtown is once again thriving. However, this resurgence has not stimulated redevelopment in some of the neighborhoods abutting downtown. In response, the city is currently interested in promoting additional access to the river's edge, whether physical or visual, while providing a strong link between the downtown and surrounding residential neighborhoods. This strategy, as applied to this site, includes a mixture of public and private actions to stimulate job creation, improve the open space system and improve housing conditions and opportunities.

B) Project Area Characteristics

The proposed Project Area consists of approximately 19 acres of land located to the east of the Lowell Central Business District along the Concord River. The approximate boundary lines are the Concord River on the west, Andover Street to the north, Perry Street to the east and Rogers Street on the southern boundary. (see Base Plan and Aerial Photo)

i) Topography

The Project Area encompasses a relatively level area along the western side of Perry Street. The average slope across the site from Perry Street to the very top of the riverbank ranges from 2-5%. These slopes do not present an impediment to redevelopment. Then, this relatively flat area





Riverbank along city-owned parcel behind Old Mother Hubbard

slopes dramatically down to the Concord River. The top of the slope is an average of thirty-eight feet (38') away from the water's edge and drops between ten and twenty feet (10 - 20') down to the water. This slope along the riverbank ranges from 25-50%. These slopes make access to the water surface very challenging. To the east of Perry Street, the topography rises into the abutting residential neighborhood, with

changes in grade being made-up within the house lots. Within this neighborhood, roads run north south at a fairly level grade. In fact, when moving through the Project Area from north to south, parallel to the Concord River, the slope is fairly level at less than 1%.



View south on Perry Street at Andover Street intersection

In summary, except for the steep banks along the Concord River, the topography of the site should not limit its redevelopment potential. However, views from the top of the bank down to the Concord River need to be accentuated. Furthermore, views from the abutting residential neighborhood down to the site and over the River need to be preserved or accentuated. Although it is difficult to see from the site down to the water's surface, every opportunity should be made to highlight this attractive view and natural resource.





Industrial use - Old Mother Hubbard dog food manufacturing



Vacant lot - Mass Electric facility entrance



Commercial building

ii) Existing Property Characteristics

The Project Area contains a mix of commercial and industrial properties along with parking lots, vacant land and a vacant building. There are nineteen individual parcels but only six of the properties have buildings on them, one of which is vacant. There is a large paved parking lot across from mixed-commercial buildings, a dirt parking lot sits behind an industrial building and the largest percentage of the Project Area is overgrown or unmaintained vacant land. Several overhead utility lines cross Rogers Street and laterally bisect the Project Area.

Because views from the site to the river and, therefore, across the river are important to this project, an assessment was made of the neighborhood along the western bank of the Concord River along Lawrence Street. Within the neighborhood across the river, there is a diversity of uses with a predominance of residential dwellings. Some commercial ventures dot the perimeter with a few commercial/industrial parcels in the center of the block. Vacant parcels are generally at the river's edge, although a few parcels could provide a





Storage units



Vacant building



Existing overhead utility lines entering the Project Area behind Old Mother Hubbard

connection from Lawrence or Merrill Street to the riverbank on that side of the Concord River. Some of the residences on the south side of the block have recognized the presence of the river by opening views onto it from their back yards, although they do not all take advantage of this amenity. Overall, views from the Project Area across the river into this neighborhood are generally attractive.

There are three vacant, overgrown islands within the Concord River. These islands could provide important connections between the east and west sides of the river. A pedestrian bridge could connect the Project Area to these islands and then on to the western bank of the river. Such a link would provide an important pedestrian connection between neighborhoods as well as into the downtown area. Furthermore, a connection onto these islands would provide another visual and physical link to the river for residents.

In general, the condition of the buildings in the study area shows a pattern of minimal deterioration and poor architectural character. The traffic on the main arteries, Andover and Rogers Streets, and the



presence of commercial uses on Perry Street are most likely causing pressure on the residential buildings in the neighborhood. Cut-through traffic on connecting streets creates further congestion on already crowded residential lanes. This pressure makes the affected plots potentially less desirable places to reside and possibly resulting in the deterioration of the buildings.

iii) Existing Land Use

The majority of the parcels in the Project Area are vacant. The Project Area contains a mix of commercial and industrial properties along with parking lots, vacant land and a vacant building. (see Existing Land Use Diagram). According to the records from the Lowell Assessor's Department, there are seven individual property owners within the Project Area. (see Parcel Ownership Diagram). Of the nineteen parcels in the Project Area Mass Electric owns ten, two are owned by Old Mother Hubbard Realty, two are city owned, two parcels are owned by Boston and Maine Railroad and the remaining three parcels are owned separately by The Christian Congregation, James F. Ryder and TRS Chris Realty Trust. Only six of the nineteen parcels have buildings on them, one of which is vacant. One parcel has a paved parking lot, another parcel has a dirt parking lot and the remaining is vacant land. Mass Electric owns much of the vacant land and uses their parcels for electricity transfer and distribution. The Parcel Ownership diagram also shows the approximate location of overhead utility lines traversing the Project Area.

Due to this diversity of ownership, redevelopment can become problematic since all property owners may not share the same vision for redevelopment or wish to use their property in a unique manner. Zoning changes should provide incentives to property owners to redevelop the area in a manner that is that is consistent with the City's vision for this area. However, since the redevelopment of the entire area may not happen all at once, a phasing diagram was prepared showing how the site could be redeveloped in smaller segments that relate to current land ownership.



iv) Zoning

Zoning within the Project Area is predominantly “Industrial IB District – IB – Heavy Industry” with a small area being zoned as “Business B1 District – B1 Local Business.” (see Existing Zoning Diagram). According to the City of Lowell Zoning Book dated July 24, 2001, the following uses are generally allowed in these zones:

IB - Heavy Industry	This zone is intended to accommodate light industrial, wholesale and storage by right and heavy industrial by Special Permit. Other allowed uses include office, research facilities and many automobile related uses. Many retail uses are allowed by right, others by Special Permit. Detached dwellings, PUD’s and certain non-profits uses are also allowed by Special Permit.
B1 - Local Business	This zoning district is geared toward retail and consumer service uses with a gross floor area under 5,000 square feet (S.F.). The intent is to promote businesses that serve the needs of residents in the neighborhood. Other allowed uses include banks, medical services, institutional, recreational, hotel and motel. Uses allowed by Special Permit include offices, automobile related uses, and residential.

The locations of these zoning areas are shown in the Existing Zoning Diagram.

The “Local Business” zoning designation includes a number of elements that are consistent with the New Urbanism approach to this Concord River Neighborhood Plan. Therefore, some of these requirements should be included in the proposed new zoning for this area. However, a more comprehensive zoning description will be necessary to incorporate other elements of the New Urbanism approach.

Other zoning districts found adjacent to the Project Area include “Residence M3 District – M3 Multi-Family Dwellings” and “Residence TF District – TF Two-Family Dwellings”. According to the City of Lowell Zoning Book dated July 24, 2001, the following uses are generally allowed in these adjacent zones:



M3 - Multi-Family Dwellings Most residential uses are allowed in this zone with the exception of lodging and dormitory facilities. Some institutional uses are allowed by right, others by Special Permit. Retail and consumer based businesses, automobile, office and industrial uses are not allowed, for the most part.

TF - Two-Family Dwellings This zoning encourages single and two-family dwellings. In general, most residential uses are allowed with the exception of multi-family dwellings, PUD's, lodging and dormitory facilities. Some institutional uses are allowed by right, others by Special Permit. Retail and consumer based businesses, automobile, office and industrial uses are not allowed, for the most part.

The city of Lowell Zoning Ordinance contains regulations regarding building size, setbacks, parking, signs, and other related characteristics that promote the orderly improvement or development of land within each district. Furthermore, each zoning district specifies the amount of building floor space that is allowed to be developed within that district. For the zoning designations "Local Business," "Two-Family Dwellings", "Multi-Family Residential" and "Heavy Industry," the numbers associated with these zoning designations reflect the maximum allowable floor-to-area ratio, ranging from 1-to-1 to 2-to-1. To realize the maximum use of the Project Area, one would need to maximize the floor-to-area ratio. For example, using a floor-to-area ratio of 2-to-1, an individual who owns 10,000 square feet of land could construct a maximum of 20,000 square feet of building space. However, other contributing elements to a New Urbanism approach, such as an open space component and flexible parking requirements, need to be accounted for in the FAR designation.

Therefore, since the recommendations of this study include mixed-use redevelopment of this site, a zoning change will be recommended to encourage such a use with a proper density. Technically, the area could be rezoned to another one of the City's zoning districts, and the proposed uses would be allowed by right or special permit. However, since the New Urbanism approach to this project includes an integration of uses, dimensional flexibility, open space components, design guidelines and flexible parking requirements, a new zoning district or overlay district will be proposed that presents a comprehensive approach encompassing all of these elements.



v) Existing Thoroughfares and Access

Vehicular Access

The Project Area is serviced by a local system of roads consisting of local arteries and smaller residential streets. Two primary east-west connectors cross the Concord River adjacent to the Project Area, Andover Street to the north and Rogers Street to the south. These are the only vehicular and pedestrian connections between the Project Area and areas to the west of the river, including downtown. Generally speaking, these two streets are the widest in the Project Area and have the greatest capacity. For the most part, the north-south streets are narrow, provide local service and much less capacity.

From preliminary observations and traffic volumes, all the streets in the Project Area appear to be undersized based on the volume of traffic they currently handle. Andover and Rogers streets carry a heavy amount of rush-hour traffic, frequently backing-up at busy intersections. The side streets frequently serve as relief valves during these busy periods, but are not designed to carry large volumes of traffic. Furthermore, they service residential areas, where large amounts of fast moving vehicles are not appropriate.

As more development is brought into the area, various roads and intersections may need to be upgraded to handle the increased traffic volume, as well as to control traffic movement and provide a safe environment for pedestrians at the same time. The residential community has already raised concerns about congestion in the area, as well as truck traffic on residential streets. A truck restriction on some streets that primarily services residential uses has been requested.





Pedestrian crossing at Andover and Perry Streets

Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian access is currently integrated with vehicular access by means of sidewalks along the streets that run through and around the Project Area.

Sidewalks found along Perry and surrounding streets accommodate pedestrian access along the Project Area. However, most of these sidewalks need to be reconstructed and upgraded to improve their condition and to include handicapped accessible curb cuts at intersections.

With the exception of these sidewalks, there are no other alternatives for pedestrian movement throughout the Project Area. There are no walkways along the Concord River and there is no connection to the existing Riverwalk that exists along the Merrimack River to the north. There are no pedestrian connections off the travel ways and some intersections are difficult to cross as a pedestrian, giving rise to safety concerns. Connections across the Concord River are provided along the Andover and Rogers Street bridges, but no dedicated pedestrian bridge or bikeway connection exists anywhere. To encourage the New Urbanism approach to this project, pedestrian and bicycle access and circulation need to be improved and accentuated.

vi) Existing Open Space Resources

The Project Area includes a great open space resource, the Concord River. However, access to the river or areas along the river do not exist. The city of Lowell does own some land adjacent to the river along the southern part of the Project Area, and plans are in the works to extend a riverfront walk into this area in the future. However, a major component of this study was to provide public access to the entire riverfront, using the river as a visual and recreational amenity.



Active recreational facilities were not identified as a critical need for this neighborhood. Rogers Park to the southeast provides many recreational opportunities for this part of the city. Therefore, the Concord River was perceived to be more of an open space resource for passive recreational use, some water activities such as canoeing, kayaking and fishing, and a visual amenity for the neighborhood. Existing and



Jollene Dubner Park on Rogers Street

proposed bridges across the river will offer the best viewing opportunities, as steep vegetated slopes falling up to twenty feet down to the water from the Project Area restrict site lines to the river. However, a trail system along the top of the bank, along with selective clearing will greatly enhance the river's visual and recreational impact on the area.

